



Vivianne Cisneros Wersel, Au.D. is the widow of Lt. Colonel Richard Wersel, Jr., U.S. Marine Corps, who served in Operation Iraq Freedom I and II. He died on active duty at Camp Lejeune 2005 one week after his return from Iraq. Shortly after her husband's death, she discovered she was not eligible for the new enhanced survivor benefits and was instrumental in changing the SGLI and Death Gratuity (SA 1376) so all active duty widows are eligible for enhanced benefits.

Appointed as Chair of the Government Relations Committee of Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. (GSW), her mission is to help correct the inequities in survivors' benefits and to optimize services provided to survivors. Dr. Wersel leads the group's efforts to raise awareness of the unique challenges faced by survivors, including issues such as the elimination of the SBP/DIC offset, increasing the DIC benefit, and increasing educational opportunities and health benefits for spouses and children of the fallen.

In addition to serving as Chair of the GSW Government Relations Committee, she sits on the Advisory Board for Got Your Back Network. Dr. Wersel is the founder of Surviving Spouses Support Group II MEF, Camp Lejeune, NC, and serves on the DOD/VA Survivors Forum. She was a local representative for the National Military Family Association (NMFA), and volunteered in various capacities with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS).

A Clinical Audiologist, she holds a Doctorate of Audiology from Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO) School of Audiology-Salus University and also has a Masters and a Bachelor's Degree in Communicative Disorders (Audiology) from San Diego State University, CA. She is a graduate of the Defense Language Institute (DLI), Monterey, CA and holds a language certificate in Spanish.

Her family is a third generation Marine Corps family. She hails from Emerald Isle, NC and has two children, Richard and Katie.

### **DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

Neither Dr. Wersel nor the Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. have received any Federal grant or contract, relevant to the subject matter of this testimony, during the current or previous two fiscal years.